11 shops on railway land demolished

By Our Staff Reporter

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Railways on Friday demolished 11 illegally constructed shops on railways land on City Saddar Road.

As a result of the anti-encroachment operation, a total of 3,509 square feet of valuable railway land was retrieved, the market value of which amounts to millions of rupees.

According to railway spokesman, on the special directives of Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, effective and robust operations were being carried out to eliminate illegal encroachments on railway land in Rawalpindi Division.

In this regard, Pakistan Railways, in coordination with the Railway Police, jointly launched an intensified anti-encroachment campaign starting from January 1, under which actions were taken against illegal occupants in various areas of Rawalpindi Division.

During the operation, strict measures were taken against encroachments in the form of permanently constructed commercial shops on railway land, resulting in the complete or partial demolition of a total of 11 commercial shops. However, on humanitarian grounds, certain residential and commercial portions where families were residing were not completely demolished.

Woman shot dead for 'honour' in Wah Cantt

By Our Correspondent

TAXILA: What was initially portrayed as a house robbery-related killing in Wah Cantt, Rawalpindi, has emerged as a cold-blooded honour killing.

According to the police, a woman, who had been living in Doha, was shot dead inside her parental home in Lalazar area, within the jurisdiction of Wah Cantonment police station.

Investigations have revealed that the killing was allegedly planned and directed from Qatar by her husband, with the involvement of an uncle.

Police said the victim had returned to Pakistan barely a week earlier, without her nine-month-old daughter, after being brought from Qatar by two uncles under what investigators now believe was a pretext.

On the night of the murder, armed relatives allegedly entered the house after the victim's aunt was instructed over the phone to open the door.

According to the FIR lodged on the complaint of Sub-Inspector Asif Iqbal Khan, the victim's husband remained in contact through phone and video calls, allegedly issuing instructions moments before the attack.

The FIR states that during a video call, the husband allegedly ordered his wife's aunt to remove the victim's sister from the room, clearing the way for the attackers. Seconds later, two armed men reportedly pulled out pistols and fired multiple shots at the victim, killing her on the spot. Another suspect, is believed to have stood guard at the entrance.

Police said the motive stemmed from suspicions harboured by the husband, who allegedly accused his wife of having an extramarital affair while living abroad.

In a bid to avoid social stigma and infamy, the family initially attempted to portray the murder as a botched robbery.

However, the truth surfaced through the statement of the deceased's sister, an eyewitness to the incident. She told police that earlier in the evening, several male relatives, including their father and uncles, who brought the victim from Qatar, had gathered at the house.

While the prime conspirators are currently in Qatar, police said legal action is being pursued through relevant international channels. Raids are under way to arrest the absconding suspects, and authorities said arrests were imminent.

Rawalpindi City Police Officer Khalid Hamdani has taken notice of the case. Murder, honour killing and abetment charges have been registered on behalf of the state.

PEOPLE throng a weekly bazaar at H-9 sector on Friday. — Photo by Mohammad Asim

LG elections in capital likely to be postponed again

Cabinet approves changes to ICT Local Government Act 2015

By Kashif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: Local government elections in Islamabad are likely to be postponed once again, for the fifth time in a row, as the federal cabinet on Friday approved several amendments to the Local Government Act, 2015.

The elections are scheduled to be held on February 15. However, the cabinet's approval of fresh amendments to the Act has made it almost impossible to hold the polls next month. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), however, has yet to officially announce the postponement.

The federal cabinet approved 14 amendments to the Act, including a change in the name of the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad, replacing it with "Town Corporations".

According to the new proposal, there will be three town corporations in Islamabad and each town corporation will comprise, as far as practicable, the territorial limits of a National Assembly (NA) constituency within the capital. Islamabad has three NA seats.

"The cabinet endorsed the decisions made in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee for Legislative Cases on December 30, 2025, which also include confirmation of action regarding the Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025," said an official statement issued after the cabinet meeting.

When the election schedule was announced by the ECP last month, the local chapter of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) had claimed that the government would opt for an escape route and would not conduct the elections in February.

The claim was rejected by the local leadership of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which said it had won the last elections and would win again, while arguing that amendments were required for improved service delivery.

The term of the last local government expired in February 2021, and since then the elections have been delayed under various pretexts. As a result, around 2.5 million residents of Islamabad continue to face issues ranging from water shortages to unpaved streets.

Earlier, the ECP conducted delimitations of constituencies multiple times and issued election schedules on several occasions, only for them to be cancelled later. A few years ago, the elections were even cancelled a day before polling.

It is pertinent to note that when the local government's term ended in 2021, PTI was in power and elections were supposed to be held within 120 days. However, the PTI government did not take serious steps to conduct the polls.

When the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) came into power, it too delayed the elections.

During the PDM's tenure, elections were set to be held in 50 union councils (UCs), but the government argued that the number should be increased to 101 UCs in the federal capital, leading to further delays.

Later, when arrangements were finalised to hold elections in 101 UCs, the PDM government proposed increasing the number of UCs from 101 to 125. Elections were then scheduled for 125 UCs, but in September last year the government decided to increase the number of general seats in the UCs.

Last month, the ECP decided to hold elections for 125 UCs, but the government has now introduced fresh amendments to the local government law, replacing the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad with town corporations and dividing them into three areas.

The first and only local government elections in the capital were held in 2015–16, which were won by the PML-N, with Sheikh Anser Aziz elected as mayor of Islamabad. At that time, there were 50 union councils in the capital.

Dense fog disrupts life in Rawalpindi, Islamabad

By Aamir Yasin

RAWALPINDI: Dense fog engulfed the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad on Friday morning, throwing normal life out of gear. Visibility dropped to as low as 25 metres in various areas of the twin cities early in the morning, but gradually improved later in the day as the sun dispersed the fog.

The fog also enveloped Islamabad International Airport from 5a.m. to 8a.m. on Friday.

According to an official of the Meteorological Department, the current cold wave accompanied by fog will continue to grip the country, including Rawalpindi and Islamabad, on Saturday as well.

Talking to *Dawn*, the official said the intensity of the cold wave and fog would gradually decrease by the end of the week.

He said continental air was prevailing over most parts of the country. Cold and dry weather is expected over most areas, while upper hilly regions will remain very cold during morning and night hours.

Moderate to dense fog is expected over the plain areas of Punjab, upper Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The official said there was no sign of immediate rainfall in the coming days, adding that the twin cities might remain under fog during morning and late-night hours.

He said the minimum temperature in Rawalpindi and Islamabad was recorded at 4 degrees Celsius.

"The temperature will further drop to 1 degree Celsius in the coming two to three days," he said.

The recent cold wave and foggy conditions have already made living conditions difficult in the twin cities, with residents also suffering from low gas pressure in various localities.

In these circumstances, the number of people complaining of cold-related ailments has also increased over the last few days. According to doctors at various city hospitals, elderly people and children are the most affected.

"The majority of patients arriving at the hospital daily come with complaints related to extreme cold conditions. We have been receiving more than 100 patients on a daily basis," said a senior doctor at Benazir Bhutto Hospital. Doctors have advised people to keep themselves warm, cover their heads and ears, and increase liquid intake, especially soups, to minimise the effects of dry cold.

Trains coming from Karachi and Lahore also arrived late in Rawalpindi due to fog.

A railcar from Lahore arrived at 6:00am instead of its scheduled time of 5am. "Due to low visibility, drivers were instructed to reduce speed to avoid any untoward incident," said a Railways official.

Meanwhile, in view of the Met Office forecast of moderate to dense fog over the plains of Punjab, upper Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Motorway Police warned that lane violations in foggy conditions could result in serious accidents.

Motorists were urged to strictly observe lane discipline, switch on fog lights, reduce speed and maintain a safe distance from vehicles ahead.

Citizens planning to travel were advised to avoid unnecessary journeys and prefer daytime travel. The Motorway Police has designated 10am to 6pm as relatively safer travel hours, when visibility is expected to improve.

The public has also been advised to contact the Motorway Police helpline at 130 for guidance or assistance during fog-related disruptions. Monitoring teams have been deployed on major routes to manage traffic and ensure safety as weather conditions continue to evolve.

AJK forest dept told to complete projects on time

By Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Minister for Forests, Wildlife and Fisheries Sardar Javed Ayoub on Friday directed the Forest Department to ensure completion of all ongoing development projects within the stipulated timeframe, stressing that successful initiatives should be developed into model projects for replication in other districts.

The minister issued the directives while presiding over a meeting at the Forest Department's Community Conference Hall, where he was briefed on ongoing schemes and overall departmental performance by Chief Conservator of Forests (Development) Raja Abid Hussain and Green Pakistan Programme Project Director Dr Zakir Hussain.

The briefing covered progress on plantation drives, establishment of nurseries and measures taken for environmental protection under the Green Pakistan Project.

Laying emphasis on institutional strengthening, Mr Ayoub said all available resources should be utilised to make the department more effective, adding that projects showing positive results would be further improved and expanded with additional funding. He also called for the preparation of special model projects for rangeland development to enhance land fertility and greenery.

The minister announced that far-reaching reforms would be introduced to transform the AJK Forest Department into a modern and stable institution on the lines of Punjab's forest administration. Acknowledging challenges faced by field staff, he assured that the department would be strengthened on a priority basis by providing improved transport and operational facilities to enable effective monitoring of plantation activities in remote areas.

Addressing employee welfare, he directed that the Forestry Foundation be activated immediately so that departmental employees could benefit directly from it. He also instructed officers to enhance media outreach regarding plantation campaigns and forest coverage to raise public awareness about the importance of forests and highlight the department's performance.

Praising the Green Pakistan Project, the minister described such initiatives as vital for environmental improvement and stressed the need for the use of modern technology, capacity building of staff and stricter monitoring at check posts to curb illegal logging.

Expressing satisfaction over the department's overall performance, Mr Ayoub reminded officials that the Forest Department was the custodian of AJK's natural resources and bore the responsibility of protecting this valuable heritage for future generations.

A number of senior officials, including Chief Conservator of Forests (Principal) Dr Sardar Iftikhar Ahmed, Chief Conservator of Forests (Territorial) Malik Asad Mahmood, Conservators of Forests Mir Naseer and Sardar Latif Khan, Chief Planning Officer Syed Attiqur Rehman Shirazi, and heads of research, planning and training institutions, were present at the meeting.

IHC orders action against police officials, declares arrest as kidnapping

Probe ordered into alleged abduction of a woman and her three minor children in land scam case

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) in a ruling has censured the capital police for grossly exceeding their lawful authority, declaring an arrest carried out without due legal process as "kidnapping" and ordering disciplinary as well as penal action against the officials involved.

Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani issued a detailed 16-page written judgement while dismissing the police case registered against Mohammad Waqas, Aleem Sohail, his wife Sana Sohail and Arham Waqas. The court also ordered an inquiry into the alleged abduction of a woman and her three minor children, an incident linked with a multimillion-rupee Naval Farms land scam uncovered by a joint inquiry committee (JIC) last year.

The case arose from an FIR registered at Tarnol Police Station under the pretext of a police encounter and other penal provisions. The petitioners had challenged the legality of the police action, alleging abduction, fabrication of evidence and misuse of authority.

In its ruling, the court observed that arrest without lawful process amounted to kidnapping and that misuse of the criminal justice system vitiated the entire proceedings. Referring to settled jurisprudence, Justice Kayani noted that the Supreme Court had repeatedly held that where the very foundation of an FIR was illegal, the entire criminal action was liable to be quashed. However, the judgement clarified that the power to declare proceedings null and void must be exercised sparingly and only in exceptional circumstances — circumstances which, the court held, were fully established in the present case.

According to the judgement, the DIG Islamabad, in his report, confirmed that show-cause notices had already been issued to police officials found prima facie responsible for the unlawful action. The court ordered the inspector general of police (IGP) Islamabad to proceed further against the officials involved in what it termed a "fake police encounter" and to ensure a transparent investigation into the episode.

As part of the relief, the court imposed a fine of Rs100,000 each on the guilty police officials and directed that the amount be paid to petitioner Sana Sohail as compensation. It also ordered the immediate return of vehicles, cash and jewellery seized from the woman. The IGP was directed to implement the judgement in letter and spirit and submit a compliance report within 30 days.

The court further directed that the Lahore police may investigate, strictly on merit and in accordance with law, the allegations relating to kidnapping of the woman and minor children, if any, without being influenced by the quashed proceedings in Islamabad.

The petition filed by Mr Waqas and others alleged that police officials, acting at the behest of unidentified individuals, abducted Sana Sohail, wife of Aleem Sohail, an employee at a private farm, along with her three daughters: 12-year-old Harim, seven-year-old Laiba and three-year-old Nimra, from Lahore on Sept 17 last year.

The petition stated that the woman and her children were later falsely implicated in a criminal case at the Tarnol police station.

The court noted that CCTV footage dated Sept 17 confirmed that the woman and her children were taken into custody at around 7am with the assistance of Punjab police and transported to Islamabad. However, the FIR was registered three days later under various provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code and the Arms Ordinance.

Justice Kayani observed that the incident preceded the registration of the FIR, raising "serious questions about the legality of the police action". The investigation officer failed to identify who had ordered the operation or to justify the presence of two Suzuki Alto cars and other vehicles allegedly recovered and parked at the CIA centre in Islamabad.

The IHC proceedings were linked to a parallel high-level probe conducted by a JIC that uncovered a sophisticated land scam involving 136 kanals in Mera Begwal, Islamabad. The committee comprised senior officials, including Islamabad Deputy Commissioner Irfan Nawaz Memon, the directors general of the Inter-Services Intelligence and Intelligence Bureau, a senior superintendent of Islamabad police and a naval commander.

According to the JIC report, the land was illegally transferred through a manipulated general power of attorney, fake stamp papers and fraudulent affidavits. Financial transactions exceeding Rs383.8 million were traced.

The report identified Mohammad Waqas, a farm employee of a former PIA CEO, as a recipient of Rs326.95m. Another employee, Aleem Sohail, and his wife Sana Sohail were also found to have received large unexplained deposits.

The JIC expressed surprise that such huge sums were paid by land provider Faisal Mumtaz and the Pakistan Navy Benevolent Association without verifying ownership or contacting the actual landowner.

It recommended cancellation of the fraudulent mutation, freezing of assets, criminal proceedings against those involved and systemic reforms in property registration and biometric verification.